

Assembly Bill No. 551

CHAPTER 599

An act to amend Section 1942.5 of, to amend and renumber Section 1954.1 of, and to add Chapter 2.8 (commencing with Section 1954.600) to Title 5 of Part 4 of Division 3 of, the Civil Code, relating to tenancy.

[Approved by Governor September 25, 2016. Filed with
Secretary of State September 25, 2016.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 551, Nazarian. Rental property: bed bugs.

Existing law imposes various obligations on landlords who rent out residential dwelling units, including the general requirement that the building be in a fit condition for human occupation. Among other responsibilities, existing law requires a landlord of a residential dwelling unit to provide each new tenant who occupies the unit with a copy of the notice provided by a registered structural pest control company, as specified, if a contract for periodic pest control service has been executed.

This bill would prescribe the duties of landlords and tenants with regard to the treatment and control of bed bugs. The bill would require a landlord to provide a prospective tenant, on and after July 1, 2017, and to all other tenants by January 1, 2018, information about bed bugs, as specified. The bill would require that the landlord provide notice to the tenants of those units inspected by the pest control operator of the pest control operator's findings within 2 business days, as specified. The bill would prohibit a landlord from showing, renting, or leasing a vacant dwelling unit that the landlord knows has a bed bug infestation, as specified.

This bill would incorporate additional changes to Section 1942.5 of the Civil Code, proposed by AB 2881, that would become operative only if this bill and AB 2881 are chaptered and become effective on or before January 1, 2017, and this bill is chaptered last.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

SECTION 1. Section 1942.5 of the Civil Code is amended to read:

1942.5. (a) If the lessor retaliates against the lessee because of the exercise by the lessee of his or her rights under this chapter or because of his or her complaint to an appropriate agency as to tenantability of a dwelling, and if the lessee of a dwelling is not in default as to the payment of his or her rent, the lessor may not recover possession of a dwelling in any action or proceeding, cause the lessee to quit involuntarily, increase the rent, or decrease any services within 180 days of any of the following:

(1) After the date upon which the lessee, in good faith, has given notice pursuant to Section 1942, has provided notice of a suspected bed bug infestation, or has made an oral complaint to the lessor regarding tenantability.

(2) After the date upon which the lessee, in good faith, has filed a written complaint, or an oral complaint which is registered or otherwise recorded in writing, with an appropriate agency, of which the lessor has notice, for the purpose of obtaining correction of a condition relating to tenantability.

(3) After the date of an inspection or issuance of a citation, resulting from a complaint described in paragraph (2) of which the lessor did not have notice.

(4) After the filing of appropriate documents commencing a judicial or arbitration proceeding involving the issue of tenantability.

(5) After entry of judgment or the signing of an arbitration award, if any, when in the judicial proceeding or arbitration the issue of tenantability is determined adversely to the lessor.

In each instance, the 180-day period shall run from the latest applicable date referred to in paragraphs (1) to (5), inclusive.

(b) A lessee may not invoke subdivision (a) more than once in any 12-month period.

(c) It is unlawful for a lessor to increase rent, decrease services, cause a lessee to quit involuntarily, bring an action to recover possession, or threaten to do any of those acts, for the purpose of retaliating against the lessee because he or she has lawfully organized or participated in a lessees' association or an organization advocating lessees' rights or has lawfully and peaceably exercised any rights under the law. In an action brought by or against the lessee pursuant to this subdivision, the lessee shall bear the burden of producing evidence that the lessor's conduct was, in fact, retaliatory.

(d) Nothing in this section shall be construed as limiting in any way the exercise by the lessor of his or her rights under any lease or agreement or any law pertaining to the hiring of property or his or her right to do any of the acts described in subdivision (a) or (c) for any lawful cause. Any waiver by a lessee of his or her rights under this section is void as contrary to public policy.

(e) Notwithstanding subdivisions (a) to (d), inclusive, a lessor may recover possession of a dwelling and do any of the other acts described in subdivision (a) within the period or periods prescribed therein, or within subdivision (c), if the notice of termination, rent increase, or other act, and any pleading or statement of issues in an arbitration, if any, states the ground upon which the lessor, in good faith, seeks to recover possession, increase rent, or do any of the other acts described in subdivision (a) or (c). If the statement is controverted, the lessor shall establish its truth at the trial or other hearing.

(f) Any lessor or agent of a lessor who violates this section shall be liable to the lessee in a civil action for all of the following:

(1) The actual damages sustained by the lessee.

(2) Punitive damages in an amount of not less than one hundred dollars (\$100) nor more than two thousand dollars (\$2,000) for each retaliatory act where the lessor or agent has been guilty of fraud, oppression, or malice with respect to that act.

(g) In any action brought for damages for retaliatory eviction, the court shall award reasonable attorney's fees to the prevailing party if either party requests attorney's fees upon the initiation of the action.

(h) The remedies provided by this section shall be in addition to any other remedies provided by statutory or decisional law.

SEC. 1.5. Section 1942.5 of the Civil Code is amended to read:

1942.5. (a) If the lessor retaliates against the lessee because of the exercise by the lessee of his or her rights under this chapter or because of his or her complaint to an appropriate agency as to tenantability of a dwelling, and if the lessee of a dwelling is not in default as to the payment of his or her rent, the lessor may not recover possession of a dwelling in any action or proceeding, cause the lessee to quit involuntarily, increase the rent, or decrease any services within 180 days of any of the following:

(1) After the date upon which the lessee, in good faith, has given notice pursuant to Section 1942, has provided notice of a suspected bed bug infestation, or has made an oral complaint to the lessor regarding tenantability.

(2) After the date upon which the lessee, in good faith, has filed a written complaint, or an oral complaint which is registered or otherwise recorded in writing, with an appropriate agency, of which the lessor has notice, for the purpose of obtaining correction of a condition relating to tenantability.

(3) After the date of an inspection or issuance of a citation, resulting from a complaint described in paragraph (2) of which the lessor did not have notice.

(4) After the filing of appropriate documents commencing a judicial or arbitration proceeding involving the issue of tenantability.

(5) After entry of judgment or the signing of an arbitration award, if any, when in the judicial proceeding or arbitration the issue of tenantability is determined adversely to the lessor.

In each instance, the 180-day period shall run from the latest applicable date referred to in paragraphs (1) to (5), inclusive.

(b) A lessee may not invoke subdivision (a) more than once in any 12-month period.

(c) Notwithstanding subdivision (a), it is unlawful for a lessor to increase rent, decrease services, cause a lessee to quit involuntarily, bring an action to recover possession, or threaten to do any of those acts, for the purpose of retaliating against the lessee because he or she has lawfully organized or participated in a lessees' association or an organization advocating lessees' rights or has lawfully and peaceably exercised any rights under the law. In an action brought by or against the lessee pursuant to this subdivision, the lessee shall bear the burden of producing evidence that the lessor's conduct was, in fact, retaliatory.

(d) Nothing in this section shall be construed as limiting in any way the exercise by the lessor of his or her rights under any lease or agreement or any law pertaining to the hiring of property or his or her right to do any of the acts described in subdivision (a) or (c) for any lawful cause. Any waiver by a lessee of his or her rights under this section is void as contrary to public policy.

(e) Notwithstanding subdivisions (a) to (d), inclusive, a lessor may recover possession of a dwelling and do any of the other acts described in subdivision (a) within the period or periods prescribed therein, or within subdivision (c), if the notice of termination, rent increase, or other act, and any pleading or statement of issues in an arbitration, if any, states the ground upon which the lessor, in good faith, seeks to recover possession, increase rent, or do any of the other acts described in subdivision (a) or (c). If the statement is controverted, the lessor shall establish its truth at the trial or other hearing.

(f) Any lessor or agent of a lessor who violates this section shall be liable to the lessee in a civil action for all of the following:

(1) The actual damages sustained by the lessee.

(2) Punitive damages in an amount of not less than one hundred dollars (\$100) nor more than two thousand dollars (\$2,000) for each retaliatory act where the lessor or agent has been guilty of fraud, oppression, or malice with respect to that act.

(g) In any action brought for damages for retaliatory eviction, the court shall award reasonable attorney's fees to the prevailing party if either party requests attorney's fees upon the initiation of the action.

(h) The remedies provided by this section shall be in addition to any other remedies provided by statutory or decisional law.

SEC. 2. Section 1954.1 of the Civil Code is amended and renumbered to read:

1954.05. In any general assignment for the benefit of creditors, as defined in Section 493.010 of the Code of Civil Procedure, the assignee shall have the right to occupy, for a period of up to 90 days after the date of the assignment, any business premises held under a lease by the assignor upon payment when due of the monthly rental reserved in the lease for the period of such occupancy, notwithstanding any provision in the lease, whether heretofore or hereafter entered into, for the termination thereof upon the making of the assignment or the insolvency of the lessee or other condition relating to the financial condition of the lessee. This section shall be construed as establishing the reasonable rental value of the premises recoverable by a landlord upon a holding-over by the tenant upon the termination of a lease under the circumstances specified herein.

SEC. 3. Chapter 2.8 (commencing with Section 1954.600) is added to Title 5 of Part 4 of Division 3 of the Civil Code, to read:

CHAPTER 2.8 BED BUG INFESTATIONS

1954.600. The Legislature finds and declares:

(a) Controlling bed bugs is uniquely challenging, as bed bug resistance to existing insecticidal control measures is significant. Cooperation among landlords, tenants, and pest control operators is required for successful control. With cooperation among landlords, tenants, and pest control operators, most bed bug infestations can be successfully controlled.

(b) Effective control is more likely to occur when landlords and tenants are informed of the best practices for bed bug control.

(c) Early detection and reporting of bed bugs is an important component required for preventing bed bug infestations. Tenants should not face retaliation for reporting a problem.

(d) Lack of cooperation by landlords and tenants can undermine pest control operator efforts to identify the presence of bed bugs and control an infestation. Depending on the treatment strategy, it is often critical that tenants cooperate with pest control operators by reducing clutter, washing clothes, or performing other activities. Likewise, inadequate or untimely response or planning by landlords may exacerbate an infestation.

(e) Pest control operators with knowledge and education in current best practices for bed bug management, such as those created by the National Pest Management Association (NPMA), are best equipped to help property owners and tenants eradicate bed bugs from their home.

(f) The Structural Pest Control Board should incorporate training in bed bug management based on the National Pest Management Association (NPMA) best practices for the issuance or renewal of a Branch 2 operator, field representative, or applicator license.

1954.601. For purposes of this chapter, the term “pest control operator” means an individual holding a Branch 2 operator, field representative, or applicator license from the Structural Pest Control Board.

1954.602 (a) A landlord shall not show, rent, or lease to a prospective tenant any vacant dwelling unit that the landlord knows has a current bed bug infestation.

(b) This section does not impose a duty on a landlord to inspect a dwelling unit or the common areas of the premises for bed bugs if the landlord has no notice of a suspected or actual bed bug infestation. If a bed bug infestation is evident on visual inspection, the landlord shall be considered to have notice pursuant to this section.

1954.603. On and after July 1, 2017, prior to creating a new tenancy for a dwelling unit, a landlord shall provide a written notice to the prospective tenant as provided in this section. This notice shall be provided to all other tenants by January 1, 2018. The notice shall be in at least 10-point type and shall include, but is not limited to, the following:

(a) General information about bed bug identification, behavior and biology, the importance of cooperation for prevention and treatment, and the importance of and for prompt written reporting of suspected infestations to the landlord. The information shall be in substantially the following form:

Information about Bed Bugs

Bed bug Appearance: Bed bugs have six legs. Adult bed bugs have flat bodies about $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch in length. Their color can vary from red and brown to copper colored. Young bed bugs are very small. Their bodies are about $\frac{1}{16}$ of an inch in length. They have almost no color. When a bed bug feeds, its body swells, may lengthen, and becomes bright red, sometimes making it appear to be a different insect. Bed bugs do not fly. They can either crawl or be carried from place to place on objects, people, or animals. Bed bugs can be hard to find and identify because they are tiny and try to stay hidden.

Life Cycle and Reproduction: An average bed bug lives for about 10 months. Female bed bugs lay one to five eggs per day. Bed bugs grow to full adulthood in about 21 days.

Bed bugs can survive for months without feeding.

Bed bug Bites: Because bed bugs usually feed at night, most people are bitten in their sleep and do not realize they were bitten. A person's reaction to insect bites is an immune response and so varies from person to person. Sometimes the red welts caused by the bites will not be noticed until many days after a person was bitten, if at all.

Common signs and symptoms of a possible bed bug infestation:

- Small red to reddish brown fecal spots on mattresses, box springs, bed frames, mattresses, linens, upholstery, or walls.
- Molted bed bug skins, white, sticky eggs, or empty eggshells.
- Very heavily infested areas may have a characteristically sweet odor.
- Red, itchy bite marks, especially on the legs, arms, and other body parts exposed while sleeping. However, some people do not show bed bug lesions on their bodies even though bed bugs may have fed on them.

For more information, see the Internet Web sites of the United States Environmental Protection Agency and the National Pest Management Association.

(b) The procedure to report suspected infestations to the landlord.

1954.604. Entry to inspect a tenant's dwelling unit shall comply with Section 1954. Entry to inspect any unit selected by the pest control operator and to conduct followup inspections of surrounding units until bed bugs are eliminated is a necessary service for the purpose of Section 1954. Tenants shall cooperate with the inspection to facilitate the detection and treatment of bed bugs, including providing requested information that is necessary to facilitate the detection and treatment of bed bugs to the pest control operator.

1954.605. The landlord shall notify the tenants of those units inspected by the pest control operator pursuant to Section 1954.604 of the pest control operator's findings. The notification shall be in writing and made within two business days of receipt of the pest control operator's findings. For confirmed infestations in common areas, all tenants shall be provided notice of the pest control operator's findings.

SEC. 4. Section 1.5 of this bill incorporates amendments to Section 1942.5 of the Civil Code proposed by both this bill and Assembly Bill 2881. It shall only become operative if (1) both bills are enacted and become

effective on or before January 1, 2017, (2) each bill amends Section 1942.5 of the Civil Code, and (3) this bill is enacted after Assembly Bill 2881, in which case Section 1 of this bill shall not become operative.

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